CLAY GEERDES **COMIX WAVE** 140
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The third issue of **ART ALTERNATIVES** features the work of R. K. Sloane, who reveals that he was only 16 when he did *R. K. Sloane's Comix and Stories* for Gary Arlington back in 1969. Todd Schorr, Gary Panter, and Jeff Gaither are also featured. The mag is published by Harvey Shapiro, 450 Seventh Ave., Suite 2305, New York, NY 10123-2305. Probably $7 by mail.

WHY HEALTH CARE IS SO EXPENSIVE

The boy had spent the last twenty-two hours of his life in the Intensive Care Unit at Western Pediatric, not a second of it in a conscious state. From a medical point of view it was open and shut: hopeless. The admitting intern had kept his notes factual and objective, labeling it Auto vs Pedestrian, in the quaint lexicon of medicine that makes tragedy sound like a sporting event. He'd been brought in by ambulance, battered, crushed, skull shredded, all but his most rudimentary bodily functions gone. *Yet thousands of dollars had been spent delaying the inevitable, and enough pages had been filled to create a medical chart the size of a textbook.* I leafed through them: nursing notes, with their compulsive counting of intake and output, the child reduced to cubic centimenters of fluid and plumbing; ICU graphs, progress notes--that was a cruel joke--consultations from neuro-surgeons, neurologists, nephrologists, radiologists, cardiologists; blood tests, X-rays, scans, shunts, sutures, intravenous feedings, parenteral nutrional supplements, respiratory therapy, and, finally, the autopsy.

--Jonathan Kellerman
WHEN THE BOUGH BREAKS, 1985.

Jesus is featured in a paid ad in **The Daily Californian**. Just the Plockhurst painting of Jesus as a long-haired blonde with blue eyes and the words *Paid Ad*. This ad began to show up in 1992. Fact is, no one knows how the historical Jesus looked, not even those Italian sculptors and painters who had the most influence on contemporary renditions. If he *was* a blue-eyed blonde, he was the only one living in Judea at the time. One of the earliest underground comix, Frank Stack's *New Adventures of Jesus* [Oct. 21, 1969] depicted Jesus as a mellow hippy and we used to joke about it. People went to church and worshipped a guy who looked like a hippy, but they'd be on the phone to the cops if this guy came to their door selling magazine subscriptions. Guys with hair an inch long used to stand around on Berkeley street corners preaching Jesus. The noon hour up at Cal was often spent with bald Krishnans chanting while the Christians ranted , all of it backed up by some loud rock and roll band playing away in lower Sproul Plaza. What a world, huh? A guy who claims to be a Christian gave the order to destroy the holy land to test hi-tech weaponry. The war conducted by the West in Viet Nam converted a lot of Christians to Eastern philosophies in the sixties. It's still to be decided whether the East or the West is most barbaric. Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Truman, Reagan, Bush--all committed mass murder in the name of the state.

BATMAN VS HOPALONG CASSIDY

A new DC team-up? Nope. A war over milk cartons in the cafeterias in Tulare, California, schools. Seems Producers Dairy Products had milk cartons with Batman and Hopalong Cassidy on them and the kids fought over them during lunch hour. Everyone wanted a Batman carton and no one wanted Hopalong Cassidy. So they're keeping Batman, right? Nope again. The powers at the school prefer Hoppy's clean image and have asked the dairy not to send anymore cartons with Batman on them.

So who's Hopalong Cassidy? In my childhood, he was a popular western hero known for riding a white horse and rarely if ever losing his hat during a fist fight. His sidekick, California Carlson, always called him Hoppy. Cassidy and his pals would ride into a town and take on a corrupt banker who was stealing the homes of poor widows in order to sell their land to the railroad. He often turned out to be working undercover as a federal agent. William Boyd patterned his character after Colonel Tim McCoy. Both dressed like dandies and were extemely polite to kids, women, and old geezers. Boyd bought up the rights to his old movies in his later years and wound up quite wealthy during the heydey of B television when the medium was buying everything in sight to fill air time.

Batman's positive image was destroyed by Frank Miller with his Dark Knight concept and the two films which presented Batman as a humorless vengeful schizoid man pretty well washed him up as any kind of positive role model for young people.

Frederic Wertham suggested in **SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT** [1953] that the relationship between Batman [Bruce Wayne] and Dick Grayson [Robin] was homosexual, but in my opinion that was all in Fred's head. I grew up reading Batman and Robin stories and it was always apparent to me that theirs was a father-son relationship. Excluding Robin, the Warner films cast Batman as a lonely, warped person prone to violent outbursts, one who substitutes technology for human feeling. By delving so deeply into the darker side of Batman's character, recent stories and films have negated the lighter side of superheroism which balanced the early comic book stories. One might argue that Hopalong Cassidy movies were unbalanced by being excessively sentimental, but by the same token the solution was not to overdevelop the dark side at the expense of all the positive values through which human beings live in a community. Modern films, given to excessive stunts and special effects, stimulate only fear, angst, despair, and anomie. The viewer feels relieved at the end of **BATMAN RETURNS**, not because balance has been restored and there is hope for us all but because the cacaphony has ended.

In **DIRTY HARRY**, a psychopathic serial killer pays a man to beat him so he can blame the detective who has been following him for that beating. This is the way the contemporary moviegoer feels after experiencing **BATMAN RETURNS** or **DARKMAN** or **THE RUNNING MAN**. You see a Hopalong Cassidy movie and you feel that order has been restored. The viewer pays **BATMAN** to beat him up for two hours and is afraid to go out into the lobby.

I can't help but compare things. As a boy watching Hoppy's westerns, I would go home and play cowboys with the kids on the block. We shot each other with cap pistols and tried to lasso each other with clothesline rope, but it was all a game and when it was time to go in for supper we forgot all about it. Today's kids are often armed with real guns and not a day goes by without me reading about one or another of them killing someone on the street. Yes, I think what happens on the street is related to the orientation of current films and television shows. In the battle between Hopalong Cassidy and Batman, Hoppy gets my vote.

-Clay Geerdes

VAMPIRELLA LIVES

Rip Off Press is starting a line of comic books aimed at all ages The first title under the new imprint, Iguana Comics, will be **Blood Seekers**. A stat of the cover shows a couple of Kirby swipes and a direct swipe of Vampirella. The artist didn't even bother to change the costume. If murder and bloodshed constitute ROP's idea of what is suitable for all ages, I extend my sympathy. I see no reason why younger kids cannot go on reading Freak Brothers and Wonder Warthog funnybooks as they do in spite of the adults only disclaimer. I'd rather the kids got into Shelton's MAD-inspired satirical trip than waste time on more vampire crap. I can see that ROP is trying to imitate and cash in on the success of Image, but that may not be such an easy nut to crack. The market is already saturated with big ugly cybernetic bags of illiteracy and I don't see why any company would want to add to the intellectual dungheap. Information on Iguana from Kathy Todd, POB 4686, Auburn, CA 95604.

Bruce N. Duncan has 30 copies of **SEEKING VISION** for sale at $15 each. Order care of B.E.F.P., 2362 Bancroft Way, Berkeley, CA 94704.

VICTORIA, B.C. 1993

Canadian customs continues to be the arbitrary censor of what Canadian citizens may receive from foreign sources and read. A new group is forming to protest this invasion of civic privacy. For information about **Sancensure**, drop a note to Jacques Boivin, 4531 Bordeaux, Montréal, Canada H2H 1Z9.

I visited Victoria, the capital city of British Colombia, recently, and while there I stopped in at a new comic book store called **Legends** [633 Johnson St. V8W 1M7]. The owner, a young man named **Grant Wilson**, has a respectable stash of undergrounds, but most of his business comes from contemporary stuff.

I was being typical tourist, of course, since the area was completely new to me. The motel was a polyglot world where I woke up hearing German, Japanese, Italian, and a number of dialects unfamiliar to me. I photographed the Butchart gardens, the Crystal Garden, Parliament, and walked through the Empress Hotel to check out high tea. I had an image of a lot of guys who looked like Nigel Bruce or Doctor Who sipping tea while they chatted in stilted accents about the Queen, but most of the tables were filled with tourists like me, few of them wearing anything beyond casual clothes. I did see a couple of ties, but only the waiters were dressed formally. It was a stuffy room congested with ancient furniture and uncomfortable chairs and I was glad to be out in the open air once again. Like everything else in Victoria, the price was absurdly high. $17.50 plus tip for tea and cakes. If you thought it was cheaper to live in Canada, think again. Even in Canadian dollars [$1 American was equal to $1.24 Canadian when I was there.], everything was 20-50% higher than I am used to paying around Berkeley. Gas is about $2 a gallon and when you buy at a gas station and pay in American money, they only give you ten percent which means they steal the rest. Everything is sold in liters and grams so the prices are deceptive to an American, much higher than you think. I saw things like AAA batteries for almost $2 apiece. The cheddar cheese I like was twice as much in the local stores. Butter was $1 higher. Housing just as absurd as California. Since any foreign money seems unreal, you wind up spending a lot more than you think you are spending.

If you're thinking of going to Canada, here are some tips. Going through Canadian customs is easier than going through US customs upon return. You have to have a birth certificate, Driver's license, Social Security Card, and a credit card. You don't need a passport, but it seems to simplify things. We were waved through in Victoria. All they ask is the purpose of your visit and how long you intend to stay. Your identification is verified at the check-in desk by the airline people. ID is checked more carefully when you're trying to get back into the States. In each direction, you fill out a customs declaration form. You are allowed up to $400 in goods on reentry; if you have anything over, you have to pay a fee. Visitors to Canada are refunded most of the GST [Goods and Services Tax], so save your receipts and mail in the form when you get back home. They accepted our papers and did not search our luggage. Since they solicit tourists nationally, I did not suspect they would do anything but make us welcome at the border.

From the Bay Area, you fly Alaska from Oakland or San Francisco to Seattle, Washington, then switch to Horizon for the jump from Seattle to Victoria

Victoria used to be a small town, then it was made the seat of Parliament and the capital and it began to expand outward. The core of the town remains quasi-antique, but the surrounding architecture is new and the changes are evident. There are a lot of new motels, hotels, and retirement condos and I suspect there are more senior citizens than young people in the population. A survey of the yellow pages tells the story. There are 24 pages of lawyers, 15 pages of Computers and software companies and services, and 15 pages of Pizza outlets. So your average person must be a lawyer with a computer who sends out for pizza, right? Along the causeway in the tourist area around the inner harbor which is framed by parliament, the British Museum, The Empress Hotel, and a number of motels, people ride back and forth in three wheeled pedicabs or take Tally Ho tours in carriages drawn by pairs of horses. Behind the horse and just below the single driver is a canvas trough because, of course, horses shit a lot, so one hears the clop clop of the horses and sees the tourists straining to see this and that while the canvas bag fills up with road apples. We did not take one of this fragrant tour, getting enough of the smell just walking to the museum or Crystal Garden. At every corner there were tour groups and people were posing in front of the statue of Queen Victoria or on the steps of Parliament or next to one of the anachronistic Cawachin totempoles that are everywhere on the Island. Originally, the pole was carved and set facing the sun and the water, then the house was constructed behind it, so you would not see one of these house-poles standing alone and to see them standing on street corners only reminds one that the houses have been destroyed along with the people who inhabited them. The poles had a protective function and were designed to frighten away ghosts or other evil spirits.

The exploitation of Indian art and artifacts is ubiquitous. We drove to Duncan and visited the Indian Heritage Center which was completed in 1990 and we had the opportunity to watch a young Cawachin work on one of the cedar poles. These days the basic form is cut out with chainsaws, then various student artists take turns working on the separate parts of the legend. Duncan has established a Totem walk around the town and there are 22 poles displayed in the community. The train station in Duncan is now a small museum and a retired nurse who volunteers there has put in a replica of the hospital room in which she spent most of her life. The room is complete with a white-uniformed manniken.

The Indian carvings and totempoles are impressive, but one has a strange feeling seeing them juxtaposed to bank and insurance buildings or sitting outside car dealers' showrooms. In a slide show at the Center a young Cawachin remarked that the white man brought the Indians three things: Alcoholism, small pox, and missionaries. Most of the tribes in the area were killed in the mid-1800s by small pox. There is a history of the Kwakiutl tribe in the British Museum. The past is everywhere.

I am used to beggars, drunks, and the mentally ill dominating the streets of Berkeley and was surprised to see none of these anywhere in Victoria. If there is a skid row, I never found it. One long-haired kid asked us for some change, but he didn't look like he needed it. A woman at our motel said a lot of rich kids panhandled along the causeway for the experience. She said they knew the other side of life and wanted to see what it was like to live in the street. I recall a lot of this in Haight-Ashbury in 1965-67. I talked to the woman about the American Medical Establishment and the way people were cheated at every turn and she said she paid $21 dollars a year and got complete care! In the US, people pay thousands of dollars all their lives then when they get old and need the care their premiums are raised beyond what they can pay so they are ripped off and their savings stolen. This happened to one of my aunts last April and it is happening to people I know right now.

Driving, I found things about the same as Berkeley. The speed limit is roughtly the same, though measured in Kilometers instead of miles. People ignore it. In the six days I spent in Victoria, I saw one cop. Berkeley has enough cops to police all of Canada.

I didn't hear any rap, thankfully. The trend seems to be sixties American. All over the radio, I heard the Mamas and Papas, the Stones, some country and Jazz, but very little black music. TV was about the same as in Berkeley, though the soap operas were done with more heavy accents. I had expected to hear more accents in Victoria, but the young people in the shops sound the same as Americans. I suspect the influence of TV. A few of the older people had more of a British dialect and I heard a few cockney voices.

The air was a lot clearer than Berkeley, but then Victoria doesn't have a giant chemical company pouring tons of poison shit into the air every night.

To return to the US we had to fly from Victoria to Port Angeles, then on to Seattle and back to Oakland. American customs is in Port Angeles. There is no john in the area so you have to go out to the airport lounge and back. There is a metal detector there. Well, we had all been through this in Victoria, so we hadn't been anywhere to get anything new to put in our bags, yet when the women went out to the john and returned, the woman who was running the metal detector stopped them and had them open their purses. I had to smile as I watched this routine. That woman was just snooping in those purses on a boring afternoon. Maybe she watched too many movies and had a fantasy going about some woman going to the head in Port Angeles, getting a gun from an accomplice who had rowed in from some other island, and trying to get it back to the customs area in her little purse. The metal checker would catch her in the act and bust her and become a national heroine.

There's a comic book story for someone. -Clay 6/12/93